

Peculiarities of elizabeth browning's letters to napoleon bonaparte

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In the 1850s, famous French Writer Victor Hugo, author of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Les Misérables*, and other works that are still popular as of today, was banished by Napoleon III for works that were said to be critical by the government. Then on one day of April 1857, Elizabeth Browning sends a letter to Napoleon, in which she uses identity, repetition, to petition Napoleon.

Identity is a strong figure in Browning's letter to the Emperor. Starting from the beginning, she writes, "I am only a woman..." (1) and the last paragraph starts off with, "It is a woman's voice, Sire..." (68) She knows that she is only a woman, and that at that time women cannot do much to fight against men or any authority for that matter, but she knows that something must be done to bring Hugo back and she gives it a shot. You can almost feel her voice shaking and cracking through this writing alone, and how scared she must've been when she was writing this. But in paragraph 6, Browning makes an interesting point. She says that she is "a wife [her]self," which made her understand why it would've been "harder for [Empress Eugénie] to pardon an offence against the Emperor Napoleon, than it could be for the Emperor." If she had really sent this letter, this really would've made Emperor think for a while. Although Empress Eugénie (who I am assuming is the wife of Napoleon) probably gets and has a lot of riches and goods in her life, she probably doesn't get to make a lot of personal choices, because those mostly depend on her husband. From reading this letter, Napoleon could've had second thoughts about his wife, and although it's not certain, but it could've been an interesting turn in history!

Second, repetition, like in many prompts and excerpts, takes significant hold in this letter. The greatest emphasis goes to the one in paragraph 4: “ but what touches you is, (...) “ What touches you is,” (...) “ What touches you is,” (...) and so on. This is a powerful way to state an irony or a sarcasm to Napoleon, because she was speaking in a highly sarcastic way like, how is it that you don't even blink an eye when someone is banished from the country but immediately thereafter there's a party set for you and you're suddenly having fun? Another simple one is in paragraph 7 where there is also a play in rule of three which makes the phrase have a bit of power: “ this enemy, this accuser, this traducer.” (53)

Last but not least, there is the play of parenthetical clarifications in between paragraphs, and most of them are given an accent of humor. For example, there is one in the first paragraph, line 9. “ Yet having, through a studious and thoughtful life, grown used to great men (among the Dead at least) I cannot feel entirely at a loss in speaking to the Emperor Napoleon.” and “ I have been reading with wet eyes and a swelling heart (as many who love and some who hate your Majesty have lately love and some who hate your Majesty have lately done) a book called the ‘ Contemplations’ of a man who has sinned deeply against you in certain of his political writings, and who expiates rash phrases unjustifiable statements in exile in Jersey. Whenever there are parenthesis there is almost no censorship, it is free of any restraint and she is free to say whatever she wants. It is almost as if she doesn't know where or when to stop. But then the sentence ends and Browning calms down again. The last one stands just after the previous one, but in line 39. “ What touches you is, that when your own beloved young prince shall come

to read these poems (and when you wish you a princey mature, you wish, sire, that such things should move nature, you wish, sire, that such things should move him) he may exult to recall that his imperial father was great enough to overcome this great poet with magnanimity.”

Browning’s letter petitioning towards Napoleon is a rage-filled letter with such strong emotion and it just gets stronger the more you read it. It is full with passion, although at first glance it might not seem like it. With three key elements, identity, repetition, and and parenthetical clarification, it is fascinating to see what things she uses most to enhance her passion and anger towards Napoleon.